

James C. Burbank House (Livingston-Griggs House)
432 Summit Avenue
St. Paul
Ramsey County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-53

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MINN,
62-SAIPA,
13 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JAMES C. BURBANK HOUSE
(Livingston Griggs House)

HABS No. MN-53

Location: 432 Summit Avenue, St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota.
Present Owner: Minnesota Historical Society and the St. Paul Junior League.
Present Occupant: Offices of the Junior League of St. Paul.
Present Use: House Museum and offices of the St. Paul Junior League.
Significance: This residence is one of the finest early residences in the Italianate or Tuscan style in St. Paul.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1862-1865.

2. Architect: Otis C. Wheelock of Chicago.

"Wheelock, Otis Leonard. (1816-1886). Chicago, Illinois. A native of New York, Mr. Wheelock left the city in 1839 to work in Chicago. Some years later he practiced in association with the late W. W. Boyington and in that period designed the Jones and Douglas Halls (1865) on the campus of the old University of Chicago, corner of Rhodes Avenue and Cottage Grove Avenue, also he prepared plans for the Baptist Theological Seminary on Rhodes Avenue. During his later years, Harry B. Wheelock, an adopted son, worked with him in partnership." (from Withey, Henry F., Biographical Dictionary of American Architects, p. 648.)

3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description: Lot 1 of Summit Court is a rearrangement of Terrace Court.

4. Alterations and additions: A comparison of the Griggs-Burbank House with an old engraving from the Andreas Atlas of Minnesota published in Chicago in 1874, reveals several changes. The two front porches at one time formed one continuous porch. The back terrace appears to have been roofed with a balcony on the second floor. The roofing, columns, and balustrades were of different construction. The arched windows on the front facade were added between 1884-1887. In the late 1920's a new wing was added, designed by St. Paul architect, A. H. Stem, who also remodelled the stone room. The new wing included kitchen facilities on the first floor, and a bedroom above. In the early 1930's, installation of European period rooms was carried out by St. Paul architect Edwin Lundie.

B. Historical Context:

An American Victorian rendering of an Italian villa, the house was designed by Otis E. Wheelock of Chicago. The style, which became popular in this country during the 1840s and 1850s, is sometimes called American Bracketed because of the ornamentation at the cornice.

The house was built between 1862 and 1865 by James C. Burbank, a Vermont-born pioneer who came to Minnesota in 1850. Burbank was a significant figure in early Minnesota transportation, controlling a large part of stage-coach and riverboat traffic in the 1860s. Burbank died in 1876, leaving the house to his widow, who resided in the house until 1884.

Between 1884 and 1887 two families owned the mansion.

George R. Finch, a partner of St. Paul's largest dry-goods firm, lived there in 1885; and Thomas F. Oakes, builder of the Northern Pacific main line under Villard and president of the Northern Pacific Railroad from 1888 to 1893, made his home at the fashionable suburban home between 1885 and 1887.

Crawford Livingston acquired the property in 1887 and Livingstons have lived there since. Crawford Livingston came to St. Paul in 1870 and gained wealth as a banker, stock broker, and railroad builder. He and his wife, Mary Potts, a niece of Henry H. Sibley, lived at 432 Summit Avenue until their deaths in 1925, when the house passed to one of their five children, Mary Livingston Griggs.

Theodore Griggs was the descendant of a Civil War colonel and a prominent entrepreneur. In the late 1920s, Mary Livingston Griggs undertook extensive alterations to the house--the first major changes since construction. Mrs. Griggs added a new wing, designed by a St. Paul architect, A. H. Stem, who also remodelled the stone room. The new wing included kitchen facilities on the first floor and a bedroom above. In the early 1930s the project for installation of European period rooms was carried out by architect Edwin Lundie of St. Paul.

With Mrs. Griggs' death in 1967 the property passed to her daughter, Mrs. Jackson Burke, who has donated the property to the people of Minnesota in care of the Minnesota Historical Society and the St. Paul Junior League.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This residence is one of the first early residences in the Italianate or Tuscan style in St. Paul.

The house is built of grey Mendota limestone and features arched windows, a bracketed cornice, polygonal bay windows, and a "belvidere" or cupola topped by a typical finial.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Three stories with wing addition to rear (southwest) of house.
2. Foundations: Grey Mendota limestone.
3. Wall construction: Grey Mendota limestone. "The outside walls are of gray limestone in a brick lining, leaving an air chamber that was touted as a measure to make them frost and rat proof." (Koeper, Historic St. Paul Buildings, p. 62)
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc: A one-story porch extends across the entrance and left bay of the main elevation. Three Corinthian columns and a Corinthian pilaster, support an entablature. A second similar porch on the west wing also has limestone balusters. To the east and rear a limestone terrace with limestone balusters overlooks the wooded grounds.
5. Chimneys: Brick with denticulated cornice.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doors and doorways: The entrance door is a double door with arched head. A secondary entrance is located at rear (south) of house. French windows allow passage from the living room and stone room to the terrace and from dining room to the front porch.
 - b. Windows: Typical windows are round arched, quoined, four-over-four lights.

The windows on front facade were added around 1884-1887.

7. Roof:

- a. Cornice, eaves: The cornice is bracketed and denticulated with elaborately carved pendants. The cupola has a smaller but similar cornice, as does the west wing.
- b. Cupola: A cupola of painted wood with a bracketed denticulated cornice surmounted by a carved wooden finial.

C. Detailed description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: A ballroom, and elevator, the door to the tunnel to the heating plant, the marble stairway to first floor, and the original kitchen.
- b. First floor: Central hallway, stair and inglenook, carved oak stairway leading to second floor, marble stair leading down to the ballroom. The east side of the house contains the living or "Mirrow Room," the west side contains the stone room, another sitting room is located to the south of the entrance hall, and the dining room is located to the west. Behind the dining room is the rear ell addition, with pantry, kitchen, service entrance and service stairs.
- c. Second floor: The northeast front contains a doll house room, bedroom, and sitting room-bath. The Master bedroom and bath which are south of the original wing, contain a sitting room, guest bath, and wardrobe room. The back ell contains the servants stairway, Mother's bedroom, bathroom, and dressing room, which opens to the wardrobe room.
- d. Third floor: Originally a servant's floor with bedrooms and sewing room: now remodeled and used as headquarters for the St. Paul Junior League.

2. Stairways: The main stairway has elaborately carved oak paneling which was added to the walls and stairs around 1884-1887. Arcaded alternating spiral and octagonal collonettes on plinths support arcades below the rails; the newel post is richly carved with foliation and billet carving. The stair leading to the ball room is marble. There is a simple back service stair.
3. Flooring: The front hallway contains original oak flooring; the dining room floor is marble; the east of the house has imported parquet imported from Venice in the 30's. The French parquet floor of the living room was installed by Livingston about 1887.
4. Decorative features and trim: The ballroom is described by the architect, Edwin Lundie, as "Reverse Venetian Baroque" because of the Baroque motifs without the deep relief of the Baroque style. Mirrored wall panels with Rococo painting line the walls and ceiling. The stairway leading to the main floor has marble niches with carved rocaille motifs.

The wall panels in the "Mirror Room" were imported from a Venetian room dating from 1785 to 1805. The stone room contains a plaster ceiling typical of English strap and scroll work, a carved limestone mantelpiece, and cavetto cornice. For further information on decorative details see field records with list of period rooms and furniture.

5. The heating plan is located in the carriage house, heat is piped into the house through a tunnel connected at the basement level.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house sits on a hill overlooking Summit Avenue, the "grand avenue" at the turn of the century. Today, many of the homes are subdivided into apartments, owned by the Catholic Church, or various institutions such as the University Club.
2. Outbuildings: There were various outbuildings, today only the carriage house (now a garage) remains.

Edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress
by Eleni Siverman, Architectural Historian, HABS
June 1984.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Andrews, General C. C. History of St. Paul, Minnesota. New York: D. Mason and Company, 1890, p. 404.

Kennedy, Roger. Minnesota Houses--An Architectural and Historical View. Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1967, pp. 142-144.

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